

"Final Project Report to the NYS IPM Program, Agricultural IPM 2002-2003."

Title:

Continued Development and Maintenance of the Vegetable Grower News Web Site

Project Leader(s):

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Cooperator(s):

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Type of grant:

Public education

Project location(s):

Throughout the Northeast

Abstract:

In 2001, with seed money from the NYS IPM Program, a web site, www.veggrowernews.org, was set up to provide vegetable growers with current "from-the-field" vegetable pest and production information. The site covers Eastern New York and the neighboring states from New England (Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut). In 2002, New Jersey vegetable information was added. Other improvements included an improved archive system with a Java script menu dependent on the archived file's name and the folder hierarchy. A search feature was also added to the site. With a map in the web page, growers are able to click on their counties/regions to receive localized information. Neighboring Extension organizations from Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut and New Jersey provided weekly updates to make the site current and valuable to vegetable growers. The site was also linked into Cornell University resources, as well as other valuable vegetable sites throughout the country. The site was made more user friendly and it is now easier to access past reports. The goal is to make this site a major information source for vegetable pest and production topics in the Northeast. Getting the site up and running was a major job in 2001. In 2002, we made the site even more useful and educational. The targeted audiences for the web site are commercial vegetable growers, Extension educators and Agri-Industry field people.

Background and justification:

During the growing season, vegetable growers need current, up to date field reports. In the past, vegetable information was mailed out, hard copy, weekly and sometimes monthly. Local counties each had responsibility for providing information to their growers. With more people using the internet, it makes sense vegetable information be available there also. Vegetable grower use of the internet is expanding. Over the years, enrollment for the regional "Pest Status Report", an e-mail newsletter increases 30% annually. Growers need new information every day. Conditions change daily. Insect flights can arrive overnight. Disease and insect problems can move with weather patterns. The Vegetable Grower News web site takes the e-mail newsletter concept

another step farther. We wanted to place all the information from eastern NY on a map so growers can click their location and receive that material. We also wanted growers to be able to see what was happening next to them in neighboring states. Now, with the Vegetable Grower News web site, New York growers for the first time could access information from other parts of eastern New York as well as neighboring states.

In 2001, with seed money from the NYS IPM Program, software was purchased and a web consultant was employed to set up a vegetable web site. Many problems needed to be solved and a layout concept was worked out. Vegetable educators from neighboring states were contacted and agreed to participate. The name was registered and a web server utilized. Arrangements and agreements made for reports to be sent to the web consultant weekly. These reports were put up on the site as they came in. The site was linked with Cornell University and other web sites valuable to vegetable growers.

For Eastern New York, weather and pest trends tend to come from the south. When corn ear worm is caught on Long Island or Orange county, growers in the Capital District and western Massachusetts can expect to start seeing them in five to seven days. Diseases like downy mildew travel on storm fronts from the south. When New Jersey has an outbreak of downy mildew, growers in eastern New York can expect the same problem within days. With some insect and disease problems, early detection is the best way to save their vegetables, money and time. Information from the web site will help vegetable growers increase production and profits, decrease pesticides and better use their time. Extension educators will be better able to provide information on vegetable problems they have personally yet to encounter.

Objectives:

1 - To increase the vegetable grower's ability to make sound cultural and economic rotational crop decisions.

2 - To provide commercial vegetable growers, Extension educators and Agri-Industry field people with a single, easy to use web site where they can find the latest, localized pest and production information. To provide information from a wide geographical area so growers can see trends as they approach their farms.

3 - To improve the web site. Make it more user friendly and provide more information.

Procedures:

During the spring of 2002, we obtained from growers, Extension educators, participating contributors and web specialist at Cornell input and suggestions how we can improve the web page.

Work on the site began in April after funding approval. Site improvement included an improved archive system with a Java script menu dependent on the archived file's name and the folder hierarchy. A search feature was added to the site.

During the growing season, Extension vegetable educators from throughout Eastern NY and neighboring states submitted their weekly field reports to the web technician who uploaded those report onto the web page. This web site did not increase workload for educators involved. This web site simply provided a wider outlet for work they are already doing but is limited to their local areas. In a way, this web site will parallel the e-mail Vegetable List that has been very valuable to CCE educators but unavailable to growers.

The site was updated at least once a week as new reports were received. The reports were kept in text format so the viewer would not have to click too far to reach a report or have slowed access due to downloading over a dialup connection. Most reports were received in e-mail format that did not facilitate Adobe PDF usage.

The ability to search for a topic was be improved. The library for past topics was made easier to access.

Results and discussion:

The web page is now easier to use and read. The search format is easy to use past articles and topics can easily be accessed. While budgeted for 140 hours, we used 25.

July 18 the server went down temporarily for updating. Unfortunately, the server was then hacked and down for a longer period of time. Between being hacked and difficulties in assigning the web technician a new access login and password the server was unavailable for updates for about 5 weeks. Web statistics became available at the end of August. After that time due to mostly personal time issues of the technician, the site was not updated regularly for the rest of the season.

Because of the problems experienced, the site was not advertised as much as it would have been if things were working normally.

After the season, we sat down with Jim VanKirk, (North East IPM) who hosts our web site and discussed the problems. We have a good idea. We have a good, functional web site. Assuming we do not have future problems with the server, the major problem is the time involved in uploading increased amounts of information onto the web page each week in a timely manner.

Jim VanKirk as agreed to set up a system where each person submitting information to the web page will access the page directly and place their information on the page themselves. While this will cut out the middle person, it will also demand more time on the part of the information suppliers. This issue has been discussed with some of the people involved and the frame of mind is we will try it next summer and wait to see if it works. If uploading directly is a major difficulty for those involved than we will have a problem. If it does not involve a lot of extra time, than the web page will flourish.

Again, the Vegetable Grower News web page is a good idea. It is the best way to regionalize information and have it as current as possible. The model is viable for fruit and other commodities. We need to get small problems at this point and hopefully next year, will be the best so far for the web page.

